

out of those internal affairs. Are you satisfied that Iran is staying out of the internal affairs? And could you give us your assessment of the way Iran has behaved from the time the——

President Bush. Well, I'm not sure I do understand what Iran's role is in the south. And I'm not sure—there have been some reports of people going across from Iran into southern Iraq. But I haven't seen an estimate on it. What was your second part?

Q. Their behavior as far as the planes, for example—they've decided now to keep the planes.

President Bush. That didn't surprise us at all.

Q. Okay. Do you want—or have you told Iran to stay out?

President Bush. I don't believe we've made a direct representation to Iran of that nature.

Q. Don't you think we should?

President Bush. Well, I think it would be better if everybody stayed out and let the Iraqi people decide what they want to do. I think that would be much—the best approach. Yes, I would use this opportunity to say that. And that's what we plan to do. And so, I think that's the best answer to a very, very complicated question and

a situation that's now in turmoil inside of Iraq.

But I think that, in terms of the airplanes, it doesn't come as any surprise to me that Iran is not sending back a bunch of airplanes. Frankly, I'm very pleased that they're not. But that has little to do with who's intervening inside of Iraq.

Well, thank you all very, very much.

Hostages in Lebanon

Q. What about the Western hostages in Lebanon?

President Bush. Oh, I hope they get out.

Note. President Bush's 76th news conference began at 3:37 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In the news conference, the following persons were referred to: President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Tariq 'Abd-al Jabbar Jawad, Iraqi Ambassador to Turkey; Gen. Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra; Nelson C. Ledsky, Special Cyprus Coordinator; Senator Robert C. Byrd; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; Secretary of State James A. Baker III; and Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf.

Remarks at the Gridiron Dinner

March 23, 1991

Thank you very much: Mr. Vice President and members of the Cabinet, members of the congressional leadership, diplomatic corps, special guests. And on this special Gridiron evening, may I single out the members of the Joint Chiefs and the other members of the military that are with us tonight. May I also single out Messrs. Baker and Strauss. [Laughter] After sitting through their parts in the program, I'll say this: If I'd had a white flag, I'd have waved it. [Laughter] No, I thought they had some very good material. The ground war only took 100 hours. [Laughter]

I'm very happy to see Kuwait's Ambassador here—Al-Sabah, the Ambassador from Kuwait. I understand that during his

recent travels with Jim Baker, Jim tried out some of tonight's jokes on him. And after hearing them, the Ambassador said, "Don't you think we've suffered enough?" [Laughter] No, but Jim put it well. We have been friends. And I have total confidence in him. Remember 1980? He's the guy who told me in New Hampshire, "Don't worry; let the guy from California pay for the mike." [Laughter]

And I understand Eppie Lederer is with us tonight over here at table 12. We all know her as Ann Landers. Apparently, Bob Strauss wrote to her recently, and she asked me to read her response: "Dear Washington Wheeler-Dealer," it says—[laughter]—"yes,

take the money from both sides.” [Laughter]

But this has been a very special evening with emphasis understandably on the Gulf. And it’s great to have so many members of the press back from the Gulf in time for this Gridiron. I know many of the reporters out there were roughing it lately. Sam Donaldson, though, said it wasn’t so bad staying at the Sheraton Riyadh. In fact, he said the towels were so fluffy that he could barely get his suitcase shut. [Laughter]

Some air war, wasn’t it? I’ve just learned the three words every Iraqi pilot dreaded the most: Cleared for takeoff. [Laughter]

What a crowd. I haven’t gotten so many laughs since my last speech on domestic policy. [Laughter] Thank you.

Now the attention is turned back to the homefront, maybe Wolf Blitzer can go back to his real name. [Laughter]

I’m glad that politics ’92 didn’t rear its ugly head too much tonight. Well, it did a little bit. And I understand that there is speculation already about the ’92 race. In fact, just the other day, Jim Palmer sent a telegram to George McGovern. It read: “Heard you were considering a comeback. Stop.” [Laughter]

No, but it has been a special evening. I notice that Bernie Shaw was sitting at the table instead of under it. [Laughter]

All kidding aside, though, really it has been, I think, the most enjoyable Gridiron in many, many years. Barbara and I enjoy ourselves always. I must say that, with all respect to the two skits and to Ambassador Strauss and to Secretary Baker, I think that the most moving part, the most wonderful

part of the evening, was the tribute to the troops. And there was a special line in it, you may have heard in the beginning: “Through the fog of distant war shines the strength of their devotion.” And as I’ve said before, our soldiers and our sailors and our airmen and our marines and our coastguardmen embodied the ideals of honor and bravery and duty and country, and were willing to sacrifice for the sake of those simple words. And they liberated a nation abroad and helped transform a nation at home.

So, once again, Budge, my congratulations to you, sir. Thank you for a very special, enjoyable Gridiron evening. And may God bless the families of all those soldiers that we lost in action.

Thank you all very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 7:08 p.m. in the Presidential Ballroom at the Capital Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State James A. Baker III; Robert Strauss, former chairman of the Democratic Party and former Special Representative for Trade Negotiations; Saud Nasir al-Sabah, Iraqi Ambassador to the United States; advice columnist Ann Landers; reporters Sam Donaldson of ABC News and Wolf Blitzer of Cable News Network; retired baseball player Jim Palmer, who had recently attempted a comeback; former Senator George McGovern, a former Democratic Presidential candidate; Bernard Shaw, one of CNN’s reporters in Baghdad, Iraq, during the early stages of the Persian Gulf conflict; and Godfrey “Budge” Sperling, Jr., president of the Gridiron Club. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Signing the Greek Independence Day Proclamation March 25, 1991

The President. Thank you very much for the welcome. Please be seated. It’s a great pleasure to see so many friends here today. Of course, a very special pleasure just now to welcome Archbishop Iakovos back to the Oval Office. He’s been there on several oc-

casions since I’ve been President; certainly before, many times. But it gave me an opportunity to express my respect and appreciation for him. He’s been a wonderful friend and a good counselor on very important matters.